

Everybody Can Do SOMETHING!"

Written by Ashley Parrish, Juvenile Justice Services
Tuesday, 19 April 2011 11:04



The month of March is designated National Disability Awareness Month. In recognition, Salt Lake Early Intervention invited Steve Mikita to speak to the youth. At the age of two, Mikita was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy and given six months to live, however, Mikita's muscles deteriorated much slower than the doctors predicted. At the age of four, Mikita's father handed him a magazine featuring President Roosevelt in a wheelchair. "The day my father gave me that magazine, my life was changed forever," Mikita told the youth. President Roosevelt became his inspiration and motivation. President Roosevelt did not allow polio to defeat him; therefore Mikita could not allow his disease to destroy him.

Mikita was the first freshman in a wheelchair in the history of Duke University. He graduated

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Magna Cum Laude in Political Science and Religion. He then received his Juris Doctorate from Brigham Young University (BYU) Law School. In 1992, Mikita was appointed an adjunct professor of law at BYU.

For the past twenty-eight years Steve has worked as a lawyer for Utah Office of the Attorney General, representing Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities and the Office of Public Guardian. "I am a voice for the incapacitated and vulnerable," said Mikita. In 2007, Mikita received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Attorney General Mark Shurtleff and he recently authored and published a book, "I Sit All Amazed."

Mikita spoke with the youth about loving yourself and how everybody can do something with his or her life. "Love yourself for what you can do," Mikita advised youth. "Don't hate yourself for what you can't do. Also, don't feel sorry for yourself." During Mikita's presentation, one youth commented, "You can do anything you want." Mikita corrected him, "Nobody can do 'anything,' but everybody can do SOMETHING!"

Mikita held the attention of the youth the entire time he spoke. They were amazed that this man, who needed an assistant to merely move his arm, has accomplished so much in his life. The youth really warmed up to Mikita when they learned he has thirty-two pairs of Nike Jordans and likes hip hop music.

The youth were captivated by Mikita's sincerity about the obstacles he has faced in his life - his message was heartfelt, really touched them youth and had an impact on their lives. When the youth were questioned about what they learned from Mikita, there were several responses. "I learned there is always someone out there suffering worse than I am. So, be grateful and think of others." "Do what you gotta do. Tough things out and succeed." "Love yourself."

"I've never wished for a cure," said Mikita. "I am who I am because of what I've been through in my life. I just want to be Steve Mikita and nobody else."